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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 003261

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TW](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [CMGT](#)

SUBJECT: TAIWAN POLICE CHALLENGED BY SKIRMISHES BETWEEN PRO
AND ANTI-PRESIDENT CHEN SHUI-BIAN SUPPORTERS

REF: TAIPEI 03234

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young, Reason 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) Summary: In the wake of the large anti-Chen march and pro-Chen rally held over the weekend in Taipei (Reftel), two sparsely attended anti-Chen activities in southern Taiwan early this week generated small-scale violent clashes with pro-Chen supporters. Ruling and opposition leaders are calling for calm, the national police chief has apologized to the public for failing to maintain order, and the National Police Administration (NPA) is beefing up its capacity to deal with future rallies. Comment: The rapid response of both government and opposition leaders is a prudent step designed to demonstrate zero tolerance for such violence. We expect to see further steps in the coming days by all sides to calm passions, even as the debate over President Chen's future continues. End Comment and Summary.

Violence Breaks out in the South Between Dueling Camps

12. (C) Following a large anti-Chen march and pro-Chen rally in Taipei over the weekend (Reftel), which were generally peaceful despite isolated incidents, anti-Chen activities in two major southern Taiwan cities early this week attracted crowds of pro-Chen supporters, leading to confrontations and limited violence. On September 18, approximately 100 anti-Chen protesters, led by a non-partisan city council candidate, staged an unauthorized "tea-party" gathering in Kaohsiung City, home to large numbers of supporters of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). Up to 2,000 supporters of President Chen thronged to the site after watching TV news reports of a standoff that had developed between the protesters and ruling party supporters. Some DPP supporters clashed with police and broke through police barricades at 11:30 PM, plunging the scene into chaos. Anti-riot police, brought in from surrounding areas, bused out the remaining anti-Chen protesters and restored order by midnight. Police said a total of six separate altercations had taken place that evening; three instigators were arrested and later released.

13. (C) The next evening, September 19, a tense standoff occurred in Tainan City, a major DPP stronghold, when a growing crowd of Chen supporters confronted a small group of anti-Chen protesters staging an authorized sit-in. During the ensuing shouting match, pro-Chen demonstrators threw rocks and bottles, injuring several anti-Chen protesters. Police reinforcements, including special riot police, were dispatched to restore order. By midnight, the police had used special police buses to transport all anti-Chen demonstrators to safety. Leaving the site, police buses were subjected to a hail of plastic bottles and rocks. Subsequently, the pro-Chen crowd dispersed without further incident. Three pro-Chen protesters suspected of violence were arrested. The whole confrontation received very heavy local television coverage, including an incident in which pro-Chen supporters smashed the windows of a red car being driven by an anti-Chen demonstrator leaving the protest site. No police were visible during the car incident.

Authorities Call For Calm

14. (C) Ruling party and opposition leaders are calling for calm after the clashes in Kaohsiung and Tainan. Premier Su Tseng-chang urged leaders from all parties to end the

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protests as soon as possible to prevent further incidents and injuries. Legislative Speaker Wang Jin-pyng (KMT) urged people to remain coolheaded and show tolerance, cautioning law enforcement officials to take the clashes as a "lesson" to prevent future incidents. National Police Administration Director Hou You-yi has called a meeting of city and county police chiefs on September 21 to review security plans. Hou, who apologized to the public for failing to maintain order,

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exhorted all police units to strictly enforce the law and issued strong reprimands to the Kaohsiung and Tainan police chiefs for failing to keep control. The Tainan police chief promptly submitted his resignation for failing to keep order in the city, but will continue to serve for the time being.

Upcoming Protest Activities and Rallies

15. (C) Anti-Chen and pro-Chen groups are now planning their next round of activities, expected to take place over the next few weeks. Organizers of the "Depose Chen" campaign announced earlier this week they intend to surround the Presidential Office and disrupt National Day celebrations on October 10. Soochow University Professor Emile Sheng, international spokesman for the campaign, told AIT on September 20 that plans remain "fluid," but include organizing both a team of 5,000 "peacekeepers" to maintain order and, paradoxically, a front force of "provocateurs" to rush the police barricades and storm the Presidential Office. Nevertheless, Sheng assured AIT that "Depose Chen" leader Shih Ming-te would continue to stress non-violent protest. Taipei Mayor and opposition KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou, who up to now has accommodated requests to continue the "Depose Chen" sit-in, warned the protesters yesterday that police would "not tolerate" any violent demonstrations on National Day. (Comment: If demonstrators go through with these plans, which seem to change from day to day, they would be committing their first act of civil disobedience. End Comment)

16. (C) Following is a list of upcoming demonstrations:

-- September 20, Anti-Chen protesters in Pingtung county are setting up for a rally at the train station plaza. Police have announced they will deal resolutely if there is violence. Sit-in organizers in Tainan county told AIT/K they will continue their protests until Sept 24. More than 1,000 police are deployed to maintain order.

-- September 21 (early morning, just after midnight), Anti-Chen sit-in campaign in Taipei organized by Shih Ming-te "strolls" from the train station back to Ketagalan Boulevard in front of the Presidential Office.

-- September 21-26, Anti-Chen campaign expected to continue sit-in on Ketagalan Blvd.

-- September 27-October 12, Anti-Chen sit-in campaign must once again change venues or temporarily suspend activities. Taipei authorities are not approving any requests to hold activities on Ketagalan during this time in order to prepare for National Day celebrations on October 10.

-- September 30, the "Democratizing Taiwan Campaign," organized by the DPP, plans to mobilize up to 300,000 people in Kaohsiung to respond to anti-Chen activities and drum up support for candidates in the year end elections.

-- October 10, Anti-Chen campaign plans to surround the Presidential Office and disrupt National Day celebrations.

-- October 17 or 25, The Taiwan Society, the pro-independence group that organized its 55,000 person "Formosa Sunrise" rally in Taipei last Saturday, said it may organize a celebration of its founding anniversary in Kaohsiung.

17. (SBU) AIT's current warden message, issued August 30, cautions all US citizens in Taiwan to avoid large political gatherings. While there has been no indication to date that Americans (official or unofficial) or any other foreigners are likely to be targets of political protests or violence, AIT continues to monitor developments closely and will update the warden message if conditions change.

Comment

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18. (C) According to our contacts, DPP supporters in southern Taiwan are furious with the anti-Chen movement and the pan-Blue media, the latter of whom they blame for inciting the anti-Chen movement. This passion, which some Green leaders have stoked, seems to be the major direct cause of recent violence. Emotions continue to run high among hard-core ruling party supporters in the south, many of whom see the anti-Chen campaign as the latest effort by the Mainlander-led opposition camp to undermine the Taiwanese party and its leader. By wearing highly visible red clothing, anti-Chen protesters increase their vulnerability to attack by pro-Green demonstrators, especially in Green majority areas in southern Taiwan. Further rival demonstrations over the next several weeks will test the capacity of government, party, and law enforcement leaders to maintain order and keep contending forces relatively calm and physically separated.

19. (C) The Kaohsiung and Tainan confrontations were heavily televised by an increasingly partisan media, embarrassing the police who did not appear to be fully in control. National police chief Hou was especially irate that the police force in Tainan appeared unprepared despite having just witnessed the confrontation in Kaohsiung the previous evening and also that they had failed to arrest larger numbers of violent demonstrators. We expect police throughout Taiwan to be under strong pressure to step up their performance if there are further clashes. Despite the latest confrontations in Kaohsiung and Tainan and earlier isolated incidents in Taipei, the overall security situation in Taiwan remains generally calm and normal. On the streets of Taipei, for example, there is nothing to suggest anything out of the ordinary beyond the immediate proximity of the anti-Chen demonstration site.

110. (C) This cable includes information provided by AIT/K.

